



Evolutionary Language Science / Evolutionäre Sprachwissenschaft

Linguistics from an evolutionary perspective

The interdisciplinary MA program of the Department of Comparative Language Science aims to understand language as a central cognitive faculty of humans, especially in comparison to other species. Central questions are:

What are the biological and social prerequisites required for the emergence of language? What causes languages to change constantly? What allows children to acquire any of the world's languages? How do linguistic structures spread across space and time? How do people from different cultures use language and what impact can language have on cognition? How is language perceived, processed, and produced? What distinguishes human language from the communication systems of other species?

The Department of Comparative Language Science at the UZH offers a broad range of courses, which are tightly linked to current research conducted by the various groups of the department. Core research topics that relate to the MA program are:

- The investigation of global distributions of linguistic phenomena. Special attention is paid to endangered languages.
- Finding explanations for the distribution of linguistic phenomena taking into account historical, biological, psychological, and geographical aspects.
- The development of language and language processing in various cultural contexts.
- The investigation of the origin of language through comparisons with similar phenomena in various taxa.
- Quantitative analyses and modeling of language change, development and processing.

Course of study

Students can complete the program as their major or minor. After the first courses, which introduce the central questions, insights, and methods of interdisciplinary research on language evolution, students then take courses from each of the three core fields: child language development, history of language, and origins of language. All areas provide students with the possibility of applying their knowledge in research projects early on. Furthermore, it is possible to follow up the Master's degree with a PhD to pursue an in-depth independent research project.

Job prospects

As with most other university degrees, the study of evolutionary language science does not lead to one specific field or profession. One of the main areas of interest for graduates is research. However, there are many other possibilities outside of academia, since the interest in language(s), experience with quantitative analyses and the ability to conduct independent work are sought-after skills in many fields. The interdisciplinarity of the program provides the possibility of working in various fields, such as language-related areas, e.g. translation, PR consulting, or advertising. Depending on personal interests and other skills acquired during their studies (e.g. studying a non-European language or skills acquired in the minor) there are also possibilities of working in areas such as NGOs or natural language processing.

<https://www.comparativelinguistics.uzh.ch/en/studying-cls/ma-evo.html>

